Kashf ul Shubuhat Publications

"The America I Have Seen": In the Scale of Human Values (1951)

By Sayyid Qutb ash-Shaheed

SAYYID QUTB was Egypt's most prominent Islamic activist and the most famous member of the Muslim Brothers organization until his execution by Nasser's regime in 1966. One of his biographers compares his overall standing as an Islamic thinker and activist to that of Ayatollah Khomeini. He is the author of several works on Islamist ideology including his radical Milestones (1964) for the publication of which he was hanged. In 1948, he was sent by the Egyptian Ministry of Education to the United States to study American pedagogical methods. He studied at Wilson's Teachers' College (now the University of the District of Columbia); the University of Northern Colorado's Teachers' College, where he earned an M. A. in education, and at Stanford University. Upon his return to Egypt in 1950, he published an account of his stay in the United States in the Egyptian magazine Al-Risala under the title, "The America I Have Seen." The same account was later included in a book edited by Abd al-Fattah al-Khalidi under the telling title, Amrika min al-Dakhil bi-Minzar Sayyid Qutb (America from the Inside through the Eyes of Sayyid Qutb). The title page has a drawing of the American flag shown partly folded with a blood-stained, black-striped flag beneath it. America may appear to be one thing, but inside it is something else totally.

First Episode

America: Location and Privilege

America, the New World, is that vast, far-flung world that occupies in the mind's eye more space than it really does on this earth. Imaginations and dreams glimmer on this world with illusion and wonder. The hearts of men fall upon it from every valley, men from every race and color, every walk of life, and every sect and creed.

America, the vast expanses of land that stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific. America is the inexhaustible material resources, strength and manpower. It is the huge factories, unequaled in all of civilization. It is the awesome, incalculable yields, the ubiquitous institutes, laboratories, and museums. American genius in management and organization evokes wonder and admiration. America's bounty and prosperity evokes the dreams of the Promised Land. The beauty that is manifested in its landscape, in the faces and physiques of its people is spellbinding. America conjures up pleasures that acknowledge no limit or moral

restraint, dreams that are capable of taking corporeal shape in the realm of time and space.

America's Share of Human Values

This great America: What is its worth in the scale of human values? And what does it add to the moral account of humanity? And, by the journey's end, what will its contribution be?

I fear that a balance may not exist between America's material greatness and the quality of its people. And I fear that the wheel of life will have turned and the book of time will have closed and America will have added nothing, or next to nothing, to the account of morals that distinguishes man from object, and indeed, mankind from animals.

The Measure of Civilization

The true value of every civilization that man has known lies not in the tools man has invented or in how much power he wields. Nor does it lie in the yields his hands have harvested. Most of the value of civilizations lay in what universal truths and worldviews they have attained. These achievements elevate feelings, edify consciences, and add depth to man's perception of the values of all life, and human life in particular. They increase the distance between man and animal in feelings and behavior, through man's estimation of life and things.

As for the invention of tools, the wielding of powers, or the making of objects, these things are in and of themselves weightless in the scale of human values. They serve merely as indicators of another fundamental value, that is the extent to which the human element of man is elevated, how far his steps have taken him from the world of things and the world of animals and what has been added to his human account of wealth and reflections on life.

So, in his feelings for this life, this fundamental value is the place of comparison and balance between one civilization and another and one philosophy and another. Moreover, it is the lasting account and is relevant to future civilizations whereas tools break down and objects perish, only to be replaced by newer tools and objects from one moment to another anywhere on this earth.

The Field of American Innovation

It appears that all American ingenuity is concentrated in the field of work and production, so much so that no ability remains to advance in the field of human values. America's productivity is unmatched by any other nation. It has miraculously elevated life to levels that cannot be believed. But man cannot maintain his balance before the machine and risks becoming a machine himself. He is unable to shoulder the burden of exhausting work and forge ahead on the path of humanity, he unleashes the animal within.

America: The Peak of Advancement and the Depth of Primitiveness

The researcher of American life will stand at first puzzled before a wondrous phenomenon, a phenomenon that exists nowhere else on earth. It is the case of a people who have reached the peak of growth and elevation in the world of science and productivity, while remaining abysmally primitive in the world of the senses, feelings, and behavior. A people who have not exceeded the most primordial levels of existence, and indeed, remain far below them in certain areas of feelings and behavior. But the confusion vanishes after scrutinizing the past and present of this people, and the reason that this zenith of civilization has combined with this nadir of primitiveness is revealed.

The Balanced Composition of Man

In the ancient world, man first believed in the unknown power of nature and around it wove myths and legends. Then, he believed in religion, and his soul was flooded with its lights and revelations. Then, he believed in art, and his yearnings materialized as colors, tunes, and rhythms. And finally, after his self had been torn between a myriad of faiths, colors of feelings, differing manifestations of life's images, and the exaggerations of imagination, he believed in science. This belief in science took place only after his soul had been tamed by religion, his senses edified by art, and his behavior pruned by convocation and after his values and principles had been shaped by the reality of history and his free yearnings. And while these principles and values may or may not have been fulfilled in daily life, at least they found echoes in the conscience and in feelings. There was hope of fulfillment because the mere presence of these principles and values in the abstract world was a great step for mankind on the path to humanity, and a luminous beam of hope for their eventual realization in daily life.

The Deformed Birth of the American Man

In America, man was born with science, and thus believed in it alone. In fact, he only believed in one kind of science, and that was applied science. Since he received nature as an untamed, stubborn virgin, and fought to build his homeland with his bare hands, applied science was his greatest ally in his violent struggle. Applied science reached out to him with effective tools for creating, building, organizing, and producing.

America as a Virgin Land

The American has not yet finished with the building stage, for there remain interminable, incalculable expanses of virgin land, untouched by any hand, and virgin forests un-trodden by any foot, and mines that have neither been excavated nor depleted. There remains for the American the continuation of his first construction effort, in spite of his having achieved the peak of organization and production.

The Psychological State of the First Americans

And we would do well not to forget the psychological state that wave after wave, and generation after generation of Americans brought to this land. For they brought a blend of discontent with the life of the Old World and the desire for freedom from its rigid traditions whether they were onerous, corrupt traditions or sound and necessary ones. This psychological state springs from an enduring desire for wealth by any means, and for the possession of the largest possible share of pleasures and compensation for the effort expended to acquire wealth.

The Origin of the Americans

And we would do well also not to forget the social and mental state of the majority of these first waves of immigrants who formed the seeds of this new nation. For these waves were composed of groups of adventurers, and groups of criminals. The adventurers came seeking wealth, pleasure, and adventure, while the criminals were brought to this land from the lands of the British Empire as labor for construction and production.

Applied Science and Human Values

These combinations of entanglements and of waves of people naturally encouraged and fostered primitive characteristics in this new nation, and ignored and resisted the elevated characteristics of some of the nation's individuals and groups. So the primal urges were revitalized, as if man retraced his first steps, with one difference, in the case of America, primitive man is armed with science, with which he was born, and which guided his steps. And science in itself, and especially applied science, plays no role in the field of human values, or in the world of the soul and feelings. And this narrowed his horizons, shrank his soul, limited his feelings, and decreased his place at the global feast, which is so full of patterns and colors.

The Struggle of the First American with Nature

And one may be amazed when reading the stories of the first pilgrims to America in its early days, and imagine their epic, amazing struggles against a defiant nature in far-flung, desolate lands, and even before this, braving the ocean's horrific squalls and its conquering waves, in their small, fragile vessels. As soon as these pilgrims landed upon the rocks, with their vessels destroyed or damaged, they faced the uncharted forests, the tortuous mountain mazes, the fields of ice, the thundering hurricanes, and the beasts, serpents, and vermin of the forest. One may be amazed at how all this did not leave a shadow upon the American spirit and inspire a belief in the majesty of nature and that which is beyond nature, opening for the American spirit a window on things that are more than matter and the world of matter.

The Secret of the Deformed American Character

However, this amazement vanishes when one remembers that mixture of the early American pilgrims and their surrounding conditions. They tackled nature with the weapons of science and the strength of the muscle, so nothing existed within them besides the crude power of the mind and the overwhelming lust for the sensual pleasure. No windows to the world of the spirit or the heart or tender sentiment were opened to the Americans as they were opened to the first humans. A great deal of this world of spirit, heart, and tender sentiment was preserved by the first humans, and much of this continued to be preserved even in the age of science, and added to the account of human values that endured through time.

And when humanity closes the windows to faith in religion, faith in art, and faith in spiritual values altogether, there remains no outlet for its energy to be expended except in the realm of applied science and labor, or to be dissipated in sensual pleasure. And this is where America has ended up after four hundred years.

Second Episode

The American Primitiveness

Despite his advanced knowledge and superlative work, the American appears to be so primitive in his outlook on life and its humanitarian aspects that it is puzzling to the observer. This clear contradiction may make the Americans appear as an eccentric nation in the eyes of foreigners who observe the life of this nation from afar and are at a loss to reconcile such an industrial civilization, with its precise order and organization of labor, with such primitiveness of feeling and manner, a primitiveness that reminds one of the days when man lived in jungles and caves!

Primitiveness in Athletics

It seems the American is primitive in his appreciation of muscular strength and the strength of matter in general. To the extent that he overlooks principles, values, and manners in his personal life, in his family life, and in his social life, except in the realm of work, and economic and monetary relationships. This primitiveness can be seen in the spectacle of the fans as they follow a game of football, played in the rough American style, which has nothing to do with its name (football), for the foot does not take part in the game. Instead, each player attempts to catch the ball with his hands and run with it toward the goal, while the players of the opposing team attempt to tackle him by any means necessary, whether this be a blow to his stomach, or crushing his arms and legs with great violence and ferocity. The sight of the fans as they follow this game, or watch boxing matches or bloody, monstrous wrestling matches . . . is one of animal excitement born of their love for hardcore violence. Their lack of attention to the rules and sportsmanship to the extent that they are enthralled with the flowing blood and crushed limbs, crying loudly, everyone cheering for his team. Destroy his head. Crush his ribs. Beat him to a pulp. This spectacle leaves no room for

doubt as to the primitiveness of the feelings of those who are enamored with muscular strength and desire it.

American Love for Peace An Illusion

And with this primitive spirit the American people follow the struggles of groups and parties, and the struggles of nations and peoples. I cannot fathom how this strange illusion that Americans love peace took root in the world, especially in the East.

The American and the Hunger for War

Indeed, the American is by his very nature a warrior who loves combat. The idea of combat and war runs strong in his blood. It is evident in his manner and this is what agrees with his history. For the first waves of people left their homelands, heading for America with the intention of building and competing and struggling. And once there, some of them killed others, as they were composed of groups and factions. Then they all fought against the original inhabitants of the land (the red Indians), and they continue to wage a bloody war against them until this very moment. Then the Anglo-Saxons killed the Latinos and pushed them south toward central and southern America. Then these Americanized people turned against their mother country, England, in a destructive war led by George Washington until they obtained their independence from the British crown.

The True Motivations for the Manumission of American Slaves

Then the North fought the South under the command of Abraham Lincoln in a war that was called “the freeing of the slaves.” But its true motivation was economic competition. The slaves that had been captured from central Africa to work in the land were fragile and could not withstand the cold climate of the North, so they were moved to the South. The result was that the builders of the South found cheap labor that was unavailable in the North. So they achieved economic superiority. For this reason, the Northerners declared war for the manumission of the slaves!

America Emerges from Isolation

The period of isolation passed, and its politics ended, when America entered the First World War. Then it entered the Second World War. Now it is starting a war

in Korea, and a third world war is not far behind! I really cannot understand how this illusion came into being, given this nation's history with warfare.

The American View of Death

Physical vitality is sacred to the American, and weakness, no matter what its cause, is a crime: a crime that cannot be atoned for in any way, a crime that remains undeserving of compassion or care. The matter of morals and rights are an illusion in the conscience of the American, he cannot taste it. Be strong, and you will have everything. Or be weak and no ideology can help you, and there will be no place for you in the great realm of living. As for him who dies, he has committed, naturally, the crime of death. He loses all his rights to care and respect! Did he not die?

Americans Joke About the Injured

I was at George Washington Hospital in the capital city, and it was evening. Suddenly there was some commotion of unknown origin that drew much attention. And the patients who were able to move began leaving their beds and their rooms and coming into the hallway to take a closer look. Then they began to gather together inquiring about the source of this spectacle in the hospital's usually quiet life. We learned after a while that one of the hospital's employees was injured in an elevator accident and was in critical condition, indeed, he was in the final round of death. One of the American patients went to see for himself, and returned to tell those gathered in the hallway what he had seen. When the ghost of death lingers in a place, there is no greater reverence to it, nor more solemnity than in a hospital. But here was this American who began laughing and chuckling while he mimicked the appearance of the injured, dying man, and the way his neck was struck by the elevator, his head crushed, and his tongue dangled from his mouth on the side of his face! And I waited to see signs of disgust or disapproval from those listening, but the vast majority of them began laughing joyously at this odious act.

Laughing beside the Corpse of a Loved One

For this reason I am not surprised when some of my friends relate what they see and hear about death and its impact on the American consciousness. A friend once told me that he was attending a funeral when the body of the head of the household was presented in a glass coffin— according to American custom— so that the friends of the deceased could pass by his body to bid him the final

farewell and gaze upon him for the last time, one after another in a long line. When the procession ended, they all gathered in the reception room. What struck him was that there was no respect as they began mocking and making jokes about the deceased and other individuals. His wife and family took part in this, giving rise to joyful laughter in the cold silence of death, around the body that was shrouded in burial cloths.

An American Woman Carouses while Her Husband's Corpse Lies at Home

The Director of the Egyptian State scholarships in Washington was invited to a party with his wife. Before the engagement, his wife fell ill, so he called up to apologize for not being able to attend because of this emergency. But the hosts replied that there was no need to apologize as he could attend the party alone, which would actually be a good stroke of luck, since one of the women invited to the party had lost her husband suddenly before the party. She thus would have been alone there, so it was her good fortune that she could now have a companion!

An American Woman Speaks of Her Recently Deceased Husband

I once entered the house of an American woman who was helping me with my English during the first period of my stay in America. So I found there one of her female friends, and they were having a conversation that I caught the end of. This friend said, "I was lucky because I had taken out insurance on his life. Even his treatment cost very little because I had insured him with the Blue Cross," and she smiled.

Then she excused herself and left. I remained with the woman of the house and I assumed that her friend had been talking about her dog, and I was amazed that she did not exhibit any signs of distress at his death! But no sooner had I observed this than she said, without my asking, "She was speaking of her husband. He died three days ago."

And it appeared to her that I was stunned that her friend could speak this matter-of-factly about her husband merely three days after his death. Her seemingly sound and convincing excuse was, "He was ill! He had fallen sick more than three months before his death!"

The Funeral of the Birds in Egypt

My memory took me back to a scene that had a very profound emotional effect on me. Indeed, the effects have lasted on my mind for many years. I had in mind to write down this thought under the title, "The Funeral of the Birds." This was a scene of a group of chickens we raised in our home. The chickens gathered silently, spellbound and shocked around a chicken that had been slaughtered. It was an emotional surprise for everyone who had been in the house. A surprise unexpected from birds as low on the evolutionary scale as these chickens. Indeed, the shock was so great that we did not dare slaughter another chicken within the sight of this group of birds!

The Sadness of the Ravens over Their Dead

And the sight of the ravens when one of their own dies is a sight that many are accustomed to seeing. It is a sight that is hard to describe without mentioning that these birds must know "sadness," "emotion," and "kinship"! For a group of ravens will hover in circles, shrieking and wailing, until they carry the body of the deceased one and fly away. All this points to the gravity of death in the world of birds!

The Drought in American Life

The sanctity of death may be a natural instinct. So it is not the primitiveness of feeling that has erased the sanctity of death in the American soul. Rather, it is the drought of sentimental sympathy in their lives, and the foundation of their lives upon monetary and material measures, and sheer physical gratification. Americans intentionally deride what people in the Old World hold sacred, and their desire is to contrast themselves with the customary ways of the people there. Otherwise, the Americans would say, what merit does the New World have over the Old World?

The Feelings of Americans toward Religion Are Primitive

And what is said about their feelings toward death may also be said about their feelings toward religion.

Churches without Life

There is no people who enjoys building churches more than the Americans. To the extent that I once stayed in a town with no more than ten thousand inhabitants, yet within it I found over twenty churches! And most of them do not go to church on Sunday mornings and evenings, but instead on general holidays and holidays for local saints, who far outnumber the "saints" of the common Muslims in Egypt. All this notwithstanding there is no one further than the American from appreciating the spirituality of religion and respect for its sacraments, and there is nothing farther from religion than the American's thinking and his feelings and manners.

Churches for Carousal and Enjoyment

If the church is a place for worship in the entire Christian world, in America it is for everything but worship. You will find it difficult to differentiate between it and any other place. They go to church for carousal and enjoyment, or, as they call it in their language "fun." Most who go there do so out of necessary social tradition, and it is a place for meeting and friendship, and to spend a nice time. This is not only the feeling of the people, but it is also the feeling of the men of the church and its ministers.

The Clubs of the Church and Their Attractions

In most churches there are clubs that join the two sexes, and every minister attempts to attract to his church as many people as possible, especially since there is a tremendous competition between churches of different denominations. And for this reason, each church races to advertise itself with lit, colored signs on the doors and walls to attract attention, and by presenting delightful programs to attract the people much in the same way as merchants or showmen or actors. And there is no compunction about using the most beautiful and graceful girls of the town, and engaging them in song and dance, and advertising.

A Church's Party Program

This is an example of the text of an advertisement for a church party that was posted in the student's union of one of the colleges.

> "Sunday, October 1st, 6: 00 P .M. snacks, magic games, puzzles, contests, fun"

There is nothing strange in this, for the minister does not feel that his job is any different from that of a theater manager, or that of a merchant. Success comes first and before everything, and the means are not important, and this success will reflect on him with fine results: money and stature. The more people that join his church, the greater is his income. Likewise, his respect and recognition is elevated in the community, because the American by his nature is taken with grandeur in size and numbers. It is his first measure of the way he feels and evaluates.

A Hot Night at the Church

One night I was in a church in Greeley, Colorado, I was a member in its club as I was a member in a number of church clubs in every area that I had lived in, for this is an important facet of American society, deserving close study from the inside. After the religious service in the church ended, boys and girls from among the members began taking part in chants, while others prayed, and we proceeded through a side door onto the dance floor that was connected to the prayer hall by a door, and the Father jumped to his desk and every boy took the hand of a girl, including those who were chanting.

The dance floor was lit with red and yellow and blue lights, and with a few white lamps. And they danced to the tunes of the gramophone, and the dance floor was replete with tapping feet, enticing legs, arms wrapped around waists, lips pressed to lips, and chests pressed to chests. The atmosphere was full of desire. When the minister descended from his office, he looked intently around the place and at the people, and encouraged those men and women still sitting who had not yet participated in this circus to rise and take part. And as he noticed that the white lamps spoiled the romantic, dreamy atmosphere, he set about, with that typical American elegance and levity, dimming them one by one, all the while being careful not to interfere with the dance, or bump into any couples dancing on the dance floor. And the place really did appear to become more romantic and passionate. Then he advanced to the gramophone to choose a song that would befit this atmosphere and encourage the males and the females who were still seated to participate.

And the Father chose. He chose a famous American song called "But Baby, It's Cold Outside," which is composed of a dialogue between a boy and a girl returning from their evening date. The boy took the girl to his home and kept her from leaving. She entreated him to let her return home, for it was getting late,

and her mother was waiting but every time she would make an excuse, he would reply to her with this line: but baby, its cold outside!

And the minister waited until he saw people stepping to the rhythm of this moving song, and he seemed satisfied and contented. He left the dance floor for his home, leaving the men and the women to enjoy this night in all its pleasure and innocence!

The Minister and the Huntresses of Men

Another minister spoke to an Iraqi who was a close friend of mine. The minister asked him about Mary, his classmate at the university, "Why does she no longer come to church?" The minister, apparently, would not care if all the women were absent as long as Mary attended! The Iraqi friend asked the minister about his concern and he answered: "She is attractive, and most of the boys attend only to see her!"

I was speaking to one youth, one of those immoral Arab youths who study in America whom we called "Abu al-Atahiya" after the famous Arab poet of the past, and I do not know whether this angered the old poet or pleased him, and he told me of his girlfriend, as there is a girl for every boy in America, and how she would tear herself from his arms at times to go and sing in the church. If she was late, she would not be spared from the minister's glances and insinuations that "Abu al-Atahiya" played a role in her tardiness in attending the prayer services. This would occur if she attended by herself, without him, but if she were able to bring him along, she would not be blamed nor faulted!

For Them, the End Justifies the Means

And these ministers would say to you: "But we are unable to attract this youth by any other means!"

But none of them asks himself: "What is the value of attracting them to the church, when they rush to it in this way, and spend their time in this manner? Is church attendance a goal in and of itself? Is it not for the edification of feelings and manners? From the minister's point of view, which was made clear by the preceding events, merely going to church is the aim. And this situation makes sense to those who live in America!

But I return to Egypt, and I find those who speak or write about the church in America, even if they have not seen America for a moment, and its role in societal reform, and its activities in purifying the heart and edifying the soul.

But what can I say? Strange things can happen in this world! For God has created all kinds of people and things.

Sexual Primitiveness in America

The American is very primitive in his sexual life, and in his marital and familial relationships. For during my studies of the Holy Bible I have come across a verse in the Old Testament that deals with God's creation of man for the first time and it says: "Males and Females He created them." I came across this verse many times, but it never held for me so nude and lucid a meaning as it did during my time in America.

Sex and Decadence

Human society has long struggled to build and forge sexual mores. It has regulated these relations, emotions, and feelings, and struggled against the coarseness of sensation and the gloominess of natural impulse, in order to let genuine relationships fly about, and free-ranging longings soar high unfettered, along with all the strong ties around these relationships, in the feelings of individuals, in the life of the family, and in society at large. . . .

This struggle was isolated from life in America at once, and it rose devoid and destitute from every beautification: (males and females) as they were created the first time. Body to body, and female to male. On the basis of bodily needs and motives, relationships are based and ties are established. And from them stretch the rules of behavior, the mores of society, and the ties of families and individuals.

With the temptation of the body alone, devoid of any cover, stripped of all modesty, girls meet boys, and from the strength of the body and its muscles the boy obtains the submission of the girl. And the husband obtains his rights, and those rights disappear completely the day that the husband fails to "perform" for one reason or another.

The Appearance of the American Temptress

The American girl is well acquainted with her body's seductive capacity. She knows it lies in the face, and in expressive eyes, and thirsty lips. She knows seductiveness lies in the round breasts, the full buttocks, and in the shapely thighs, sleek legs and she shows all this and does not hide it. She knows it lies in clothes: in bright colors that awaken primal sensations, and in designs that reveal the temptations of the body— and in American girls these are sometimes live, screaming temptations! Then she adds to all this the fetching laugh, the naked looks, and the bold moves, and she does not ignore this for one moment or forget it!

The American Dream Boy

The American boy knows well that the wide, strapping chest is the lure that cannot be denied by any girl, and that her dreams do not fall upon anyone as much as they fall upon the cowboys. A young nurse in a hospital told me very frankly, "I want nothing in the man of my dreams but two strong arms he can really squeeze me with!" And Look magazine ran a survey of several girls of different ages and levels of education and classes around what it called "ox muscles" and the overwhelming majority declared their open attraction for boys with ox muscles!

Sex and the Materialism of Life in America

There is no doubt that this fascination with physical strength is indicative of the vitality of this nation and its sensuality. If this fascination were tamed and sublimated, it could lead to the creation of a great art that would remove the gloominess of life and infuse the human spirit with fragrance, and bind the sexes with ties higher and more beautiful than the ties of thirsty bodies, burning passions, and eye-popping sex that beckons through the limbs, and is embodied in motions and gestures. But the nature of life in America, and the circumstance that conditioned the formation of the American people, does not help with any of this, instead it resists and fights it.

The Matter of Sex is Biological in America

The word "bashful" has become a dirty, disparaging word in America. For Americans sexual relations have always conformed to the laws of the jungle. Some Americans philosophize about it, such as one of the girls in the university

who once told me: "The matter of sex is not a moral matter at all. It is but a question of biology, and when we look at it from this angle it becomes clear that the use of words like moral and immoral, good and bad, are irrelevant." It may appear that Americans are not only strange, but amusing. Some of them excuse themselves and justify it as one doctoral student did: "We here are occupied with work, and we do not wish to be hindered from it, and we do not have time to invest in feelings. Moreover, books try our nerves, so we wish to do away with this worry to free ourselves for work with relaxed nerves!"

The Americans' Nerves

I did not wish to comment on these statements at the time, for my concern was with knowing how they thought about the matter. But there is nothing in America that indicates relaxed nerves, despite every easy means of life, and all its guaranteed assurances, and every ease and means of expending extra energy.

The Americans Are Free of Humanity

Some of them call this freedom from hypocrisy and facing the truth, but there is a fundamental difference between freedom from hypocrisy and freedom from the components of humanity that separate man from animals. Humanity in its long history was not unaware that sexual desires are normal and true, but it, consciously or unconsciously, struggled to control them, escaping its slavery and distancing themselves from its primitive levels.

Yes, it is a need, so why does humanity shy away from realizing its need? Because it feels inherently that controlling such desires is testament to freedom from slavery and to going beyond the first rungs of humanity's evolution, and that a return to the freedom of the jungle is a gripping slavery and a relapse to the first primitive levels.

Third Episode

Artistic Primitiveness in America

The American is primitive in his artistic tastes, whether in his judgment of art or his own artistic works. Jazz music is his music of choice. It is this music that the

savage bushmen created to satisfy their primitive desires, and their desire for noise on the one hand, and the abundance of animal noises on the other. The American's enjoyment of jazz does not fully begin until he couples it with singing like crude screaming. And the louder the noise of the voices and instruments, until it rings in the ears to an unbearable degree, the greater the appreciation of the listeners. The voices of appreciation are raised, and palms are raised in continuous clapping that could deafen ears.

Americans and the Opera

But the American people enjoy the opera, are attracted to the symphony, crowd the ballet, and watch classic theatrical performances to the extent that one might not find a spare seat. It happens that sometimes you may not find a place unless you reserve it days in advance, paying high prices for these shows.

Films and More Films

The cinema is the art of the masses, for it is the art of skill, polish, craft, and accuracy. It is by its nature more dependent upon skill than it is upon artistic spirit, you may be amazed at the American genius in it. Despite this the English, French, Russian, and Italian films remain more elegant than American films, even though they are less skillfully crafted.

The great majority of American films clearly possess simplistic story lines and primitive emotions. They are generally police films and cowboy films. Elevated, brilliant films like "Gone with the Wind,""Wuthering Heights,""Singing Bernadette," and so on, are exceptional in relation to the rest of American production, and what is seen of American films in Egypt or the Arab countries does not illustrate this proportion, because most of them are from the finest, rarest movies of America. Those who visit the theater in America understand this small proportion of quality films.

Natural Scenery in American Art

There is another art in which the Americans have distinguished themselves, for it is more a matter of skill in production than of authentic, elevated art: it is the art of representing natural scenery with colors, as if it were an accurate, true photograph. It is in the museums of marine and land biology, creatures or their preserved bodies are displayed in their natural habitats as if they were real, and

the artist's brilliant portrayal of these habitats, combined with artistic design of the scenes, surpasses the limits of amazement.

Primitiveness in Tastes and Preferences

Now we leave these elevated levels of art and feelings to descend to the colors of clothing and the taste of food.

The Clothes of the Americans

Primitiveness of tastes cannot be illustrated more clearly than in these screaming, loud colors, and elaborate large patterns, a lion or a tiger leaping on the chest, an elephant or wild ox prostrating on the back, a naked girl stretched on a necktie from top to bottom, or a palm tree that climbs up it from bottom to top.

So often our commentators do speak of "holiday clothing" in the villages, or the wedding dresses in the village, with their garish, primitive colors that do not match except for the fact that they are the most explosive of colors. I wish these commentators could see the shirts of the boys in America, let alone the clothes of the girls! And as long as commentators speak of tattoos on the gypsies, or in Central Africa, I wish they could see the arms of the American youths and their chests and backs, defiled with green lines, snakes and serpents, naked girls, and trees and jungles. Remember this is happening in modern America, in the New World, in the new universe.

The Food of the Americans

As for their food, that too is very strange. You will attract attention, and cause disbelief, if you request another cube of sugar for the cup of coffee or tea that you drink in America. Sugar is reserved for pickles and salads, while salt, my good sir, is saved for apples and watermelons.

On your plate you will find combined a piece of salted meat, some boiled corn, some boiled peas, and some sweet jam. And on top of all this is what Americans call gravy, which is composed sometimes of fat, vinegar, flour, broth, apples, salt and pepper, and sugar, and water.

Sayyid Qutb Makes Fun of the Americans

We were at the table in one of the cafeterias of the University, when I saw some Americans putting salt on their watermelon. And I was prepared to see these strange fads and also to play jokes on them from time to time. And I said, faking innocence, "I see you sprinkling salt on the watermelon." One of them said," Yes! Don't you do the same in Egypt?" I said, "No! We sprinkle pepper!" A surprised and curious girl said," How would that taste?" I said, "You can try for yourself!" She tasted it and said approvingly," It's tasty!" and so did all the others.

On another day in which watermelon was served, and most of the same people were at the table, I said "Some of us in Egypt use sugar at times instead of pepper." One of them tried it and said, "How tasty!" and so did all the others.

The American Haircut

In summary, anything that requires a touch of elegance is not for the American, even haircuts! For there was not one instance in which I had a haircut there when I did not return home to even with my own hands what the barber had wrought, and fix what the barber had ruined with his awful taste.

America's Role in the World

America has a principal role in this world, in the realm of practical matters and scientific research, and in the field of organization, improvement, production, and management. All that requires mind power and muscle are where American genius shines, and all that requires spirit and emotion are where American naiveté and primitiveness become apparent.

For humanity to be able to benefit from American genius they must add great strength to the American strength. But humanity makes the gravest of errors and risks losing its account of morals, if it makes America its example in feelings and manners.

Of the Virtues of America

All this does not mean that Americans are a nation devoid of virtue, or else, what would have enabled them to live? Rather, it means that America's virtues are the virtues of production and organization, and not those of human and social

morals. America's are the virtues of the brain and the hand, and not those of taste and sensibility.

—Translated by Tarek Masoud and Ammar Fakeeh
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